

"Songs In The Night: Song Of Bethlehem!"

Text: John 1:4,5,

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness overcame it not."

Scripture: John 1:1-14

(Illustration of Luther and Christmas tree)

In the ancient world into which Jesus was born, light was very important. The pagan religions all had beliefs about light and darkness. The mystery religions which came mostly from Persia, all dealt with beliefs about light and darkness. The Gnostic religion in particular really delved into the theories of light and dark. The word Gnosis from which the word Gnostic is derived, meant knowledge. We have the word agnostic today which is a derivative from Gnosis. The Gnostics were people who were named thus, because they possessed the knowledge, and they supposedly knew the answers to things. To them light was the realm or the area in which the good gods lived and operated. Conversely darkness was the realm in which the evil gods operated and lived. There was to them a constant struggle taking place between good and evil. So when John speaks in his Gospel, using the term Word to apply to Jesus, and pointing to The Word being the Light, he is probably telling the Gnostics and the followers of the mystery religions in that area, that here was The God to overcome the darkness. In fact he states, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." In this Jesus was all of the fullness of life. This life is the answer from God to light the darkness in the lives of men. Then he goes on, "And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness overcame it not."

We must remember that John is using past tense when he is speaking to these people, because Jesus has lived on earth, He has suffered death, and He has arisen and ascended to God. So John is telling them that the light shone forth into the darkness of the world. ~~There was~~ Satan, the god of darkness was unable to overcome this Light, though he did his worst. Thus we can see that John poses a formidable argument for his foes.

But, if we read in other parts of scripture, we see that light is referred to in many other passages. In the Gospel of Matthew for instance we read that the birth of Jesus was heralded by a bright star, or light in other words.

This light was also a sign. Isaiah spoke of the birth of Immanuel, he told of God giving a sign. The sign was not only the birth of a baby in a miraculous way, but the sign of the savior as well.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds we read, "And the glory of the Lord shone round about them," light again. When Jesus was transfigured before His disciples on the Mount, "His clothes were as white as snow and His face shone with a light." At the tomb the angel appeared in ~~white~~ bright and dazzling white. Now each of these instances make a specific mention of light, or the appearance of light. In other words, all of these references to light, was something these people could understand and identify with. The Light was that which overcame darkness.

(Illustration of girl and mother is light of world)

This is what John was trying to convey to anyone who heard or read his words, "That Jesus Christ, is the Light of the World." This is why we decorate with lights on trees and in windows of our homes. This is why we light candles in church. It is not to observe some time honored custom, or to have something to do. But it is to signify that Jesus Christ, the Light of the World is present. And when we extinguish the candles at the end of the service, we do so to signify that the Light of the World is ~~xxx~~ departing with us, and being carried out into the world by each worshiper who has been here. It is to show that Jesus Christ is not confined to just this sanctuary, but is anywhere that His followers will take Him.

The light that Jesus brought at His birth and the light He continues to bring into the lives of men and women throughout the world, is a light that brings order out of chaos. In the beginning of the world at its creation, God said, "Let there be light" and there was light, and this light brought order out of chaos. At the birth of Jesus, God was in essence saying to the world again, "Let there be light." He was sending forth His light to shine into the darkness that had settled over the world. A darkness of despair, and frustration. A darkness of hunger and greed. A darkness disease, poverty, hatred, worry, and sin in general. A darkness that could only be overcome by the intervention

of a force that was more powerful than the darkness itself.

(Illustration of man in railway station phone booth)

So it is with the world and with us, if we close our hearts to the darkness surrounding us, and we open our lives to the Light that is being offered to us by God, "The Light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness cannot overcome it." Where once there was darkness and despair there is Light and Hope. When Jesus comes into the heart of an individual, the uncertainties and doubts are gone. That person need never walk in darkness again, for he has someone living within his heart that can dispel all of the fears and blacknesses that make life a nightmare.

Phillips Brooks was a noted minister who served the Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia in the 1800's. His parishioners sent him abroad to travel and study for a year. In December of that year his travels took him to Bethlehem. There he retraced the steps of His Saviour Jesus Christ, and on Christmas Eve he went to the little town of Bethlehem. He stood in the old church, close to the spot where Jesus was supposedly born, and he listened to the people singing hymns as they worshiped God in this church. Two years later he remembered the night, and he was so filled with emotion, that he sat down and wrote, "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie; Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by: Yet in thy dark streets shineth the Everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight." It had only taken him a few minutes to compose ^{the} ~~this~~ entire hymn. This is the lovely hymn our choir sang as a part of their anthem.

What Mr. Brooks mentions is the Everlasting Light shining in the dark streets of Bethlehem. And if we let our minds wander, we can visualize that little ancient town, nestled in the darkness of that entire region of Palestine and how the news of the birth of a king must have dispelled some of the dreary darkness of those days. Men of old came and asked, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews?" And people today are still asking, "Where Is Our King?" Some have found Him and others are still searching.

Perhaps we can best sum all of this up with an old fable.

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice
before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness, and the
peoples with His truth.

ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT DECEMBER 8, 1974
REV. RALPH C. LINK, PASTOR
MRS. MARILYN STEPHENSON, ORGANIST
MR. RALPH COOPER, CHOIR DIRECTOR
GORDON KENNEDY, JEFF CAMPBELL - ACOLYTES

ORDER OF WORSHIP 11:00 A.M.

PRELUDE MUSIC: "JESUS, THE SAVIOR DRAWETH NEAR" STAIRS
"LITTLE SUITE FOR CHRISTMAS" WILSON
SILENT PRAYER

*PROCESSIONAL HYMN No. 112 "O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL"

*ASCRPTION - CHORAL AMEN

*EXHORTATION

*CONFESSION (IN UNISON) "O GOD, WHO HAS GIVEN US THE
POWER TO DISCERN GOOD FROM EVIL, HEAR US AS WE CONFESS
OUR SINS. WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE FAILED THEE AND OUR-
SELVES. REGARDLESS OF HOW GOOD WE HAVE BEEN, WE REALIZE
THAT WE HAVE NOT BEEN THE KIND OF PERSON THAT YOU WANT
US TO BE. SOMETIMES OUR BELIEF IN OUR OWN GOODNESS HAS
PREVENTED US FROM SEEING OUR SINFULNESS. WE HAVE FELT
THAT ACKNOWLEDGING YOU HAS MADE US BETTER THAN OTHERS.
OPEN OUR EYES, O LORD, TO OUR HIDDEN SINS, AS WE MAKE A
SINCERE AND HUMBLE CONFESSION IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. AMEN."

*KYRIE (CHOIR, CONGREGATION AND PASTOR)

*ASSURANCE OF PARDON - CHORAL AMEN

*PRAISE

*PASTOR: O LORD OPEN OUR LIPS.

*PEOPLE: AND OUR MOUTH SHALL SHOW FORTH THY PRAISE

*DOXOLOGY No. 551

SCRIPTURE LESSON: JOHN 1: 1-14

LIGHTING OF ADVENT CANDLES

HYMN No. 109 "AWAY IN A MANGER"

*AFFIRMATION OF OUR FAITH (APOSTLES' CREED)

*GLORIA PATRI

*CALL TO PRAYER

*PASTOR: THE LORD BE WITH YOU.

*PEOPLE: AND WITH THY SPIRIT.

*PASTOR: LET US PRAY.

*PRAYER AND PRAYER RESPONSE

ACOLYTE PINK: STEVE BENEARE
GORDON KENNEDY.

OFFERING

OFFERTORY: ANTHEM: "COME THOU LONG - EXPECTED JESUS"
BY WILSON CHOIR AND SOLO BY HOWDY BOLAM.

INSTALLATION OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

ANTHEM: "O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM" WILSON

WOMEN'S TWO-PART CHORUS AND CHOIR

SERMON: "SONGS IN THE NIGHT: SONG OF BETHLEHEM!"

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

*HYMN OF DEDICATION No. 118 "THE FIRST NOWELL"

*BENEDICTION AND THREE FOLD AMEN

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "GLORIA" FROM THE LITTLE SUITE WILSON

----- *CONGREGATION STANDING -----

THE LOVELY FLOWERS ON THE ALTAR HAVE BEEN PLACED BY
MR. AND MRS. RALPH TAIT IN MEMORY OF "LOVED ONES"
SERVING AS USHERS TODAY ARE: *WALLY FEDER, JOHN SNOW,
MONT MACKINNEY, JAMES MALONEY, STEVE VARGO.

HOSPITALIZED: JAMES STEWART, ROOM 10335, PRES. UNIV.

HOSP. PITTS. 15213; MRS. HARRY L. DUTTER - BCMH.?

NURSERY WILL BE PROVIDED TODAY BY MRS. STEVE VARGO
AND KAREN KENNEDY.

THE ATTENDANCE LAST SUNDAY WAS 197.

THOSE ELECTED FOR ELDER: ROBERT BASEHORE AND EUGENE

STEPHENSON; THOSE ELECTED DEACON WERE: MRS. JOAN

MASTER, DONALD KENNEDY, PAUL PFABE AND WILLIAM PFLUGH.

TONIGHT - 6-7 - YOUTH CHOIR PRACTICE

TONIGHT - 7-9 - YOUTH FELLOWSHIP MEETING

THURS. - 10:30 A.M. - MEETING AND LUNCHEON AT MRS. - OUT

HELEN SHEPPECK'S HOME FOR THE MARY MARTHA CIRCLE.

FRI. - 6:00 - ARC POT LUCK SUPPER - THE GROUP WILL

DECORATE ONE TREE AND PUT UP THE MANGER SCENE.

WE WISH TO EXTEND OUR BEST WISHES TODAY TO MRS.

SHIRLEY LINK WHO HAS A BIRTHDAY TODAY.

NEXT SUNDAY - CHURCH FAMILY CHRISTMAS PROGRAM IN THE

UNDERCROFT - COME OUT AND JOIN IN THE FELLOWSHIP

OF THE CHURCH - WE HEARD SANTA WOULD BE THERE.

THE BIBLES IN THE THIRD ORDER ARE IN NOW - PICK THEM

UP IN THE OFFICE.

THE NEW 1975 ENVELOPES ARE ALL OUT - PLEASE DO NOT

USE THEM UNTIL THE FIRST WEEK IN JAN. 1975 - AT THAT

TIME PLEASE THROW ALL BACK YEARS AWAY - EACH YEAR

YOU GET A DIFFERENT NUMBER AND IT IS VERY CONFUSING

TO GO BACK AND PICK UP OLD NUMBERS.

POINSETTA'S WILL ALL BE \$5.50 - PLEASE LEAVE B. KNOW NOW.

Welcome visitors/make feel at home

This why decor lites trees/houses/windows
 This why lite candles in ch.
 not mere custom/or have something do,
 it signify Js Xp lite of world present with us,
 when exting end serv, mean Js Xp depart with us,
 & lit of World carried 4th in2 world by ea worshi
 It show Js Xp not confine this sanc, but anywher
 is follows take Him

Lit Js brot at birth, & lite He continue bring in
 lives men/women thruout world, is lite bring order
 out chaos.
 In beg world at crea G say, "Let B lite, & was lite"
 this lite bring order out chaos,
 At birth Js G say in essen again 2 world, "Let B lit
 He send 4th lite shine in 2 darkn settle over worl

A darkn despair/frustration/hung/greed/
 " " disease/pover/hate/worry/sin in Gen
 " " only overcome by interven force more power
 them itsel

(Illus. man phone booth)
 So is with world & us,
 if we close harts dark surround us,
 & ope live lite be offer 2 us by G,
 (read text again) last part
 Where once dark/deapair/ there now lite/hope
 When Js come in2 hart indiv uncerta/doubts gone
 That pers never walk dark again,
 4 he have some1 live inside him, can dispel
 all fears/blacknesses make life nitemare

Phillips Brooks noted minis H. Trin, Phila 1800's
 Cong send abrod 4 yr/Dec. Holy Land
 Xmas Eve old ch Js suppos born in Beth.
 ten peop sing hims as wors G that ch
 c yrs latefilled emot, dat & wrote,
 (Illus O Little Town Of Bethlehem)
 only coup mins compose entire him,
 this choir sang as anthem this AM

Mr. Brooks write "Everlast lite, shine dark sts Beth
 If let minds wander, can G anc town nestle dark of
 entire region Palestine,
 & how news birth king dispel some drear dark of day

Men of old ask, "Where He born king Jews?"
 Peop 2day still ask, "Where our king?"
 Some found/somes still search
 Perhaps can sum up old fable,
 (Fable Indian merchant)
 as 1nce again wend way lit town Beth we need
 this lite touch our lives & fill with lite

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 " Him was life; and the life was the Light of men.
 And the Light shineth in the darkness; and the
 darkness overcame it not."

Scripture: John 1:1-14

(Illus. Luther Xmas tree)
 In ancient world Js born, lite very import.
 pagan religis all had beliefs bout lite/darkness
 mystery religis mostly Persia/delt lite/dark.
 Gnostics partic, theory lite/dark

Gnosis/Gnostic deriv, mean knowledge
 Agnostic from Gnosis
 Gnostics possess knowled, knew ans 2 things
 2 them lite/dark relm gods good/evil

constant strug tween good/evil
 Jn speak Js as lite, he tell Gnostics here G end
 darkness
 In fact he state, (read text)

In Js, fulness life
 this life answ from G 2 lit dark in lives men
 "And lite shineth dark/& dark overcame it not."

Must remem Jn use past tense when speak peop,
 cause Js lived/died/rose/ascended,
 He now lite shine 4th in world
 Satan, G of dark unable overcome this Light
 Thus Jn pose formidable argum 4 his foes

If read other Scrips C light referred many other pas:
 Gof Matt, Js birth herald brite star, or lite
 This lite also sign,
 Is. spoke birth Imman, told G give sign
 Sign not only birth baby mirac way/but sign star

When ang appear sheps, "And glory Lord shone round
 about them" lite again.
 Js transfig B4 disc on Mt, "His clothes white as
 snow, & His face shone with lite"
 At tomb ang appear in brite dazz white.

Each instanrefer Light, this Light overcome dark.
 (Illus girl & mother lite of world)
 "This Jn try convey any1 herd/red words,
 JS LITE OF WORLD

Let us not just look 4 babe/star,
let us seek source that lite, which Js Xp,
The Lord, Our Saviour, who is lite of world

3

This lite that dispel dark gloom inflation,
oil crises, power blackouts & all ills of 2day.
This lite can mend broken homes/marriages,
t'is lite can shine dark of endless days of despair
4 any & all who will come 2 lite.

Chorus old hymn sung as yg lad SS invites,
"Come to the lite, tis shining 4 thee; sweetly the
lite has dawned upon ~~me~~ me, once I was blind, but
now I can see, the light of the world is Jesus."

These are the Songs In The Night, & bin partic
Song of Beth.

Will U come 2 the lite?

" " surrender 2 Him & let Him shine in dark
of your hart?

If never done so, 2day day 2 do it.

If any here not complete sure relationship Js Xp,
& would like talk about it,

or discuss with me,

C me in office after service,

or contact 2day, or sometime this week,

& I B glad talk with U about it.

Shirley & Ralph Charles Link, Nancy Link, Dale with Lianne his wife, Lloyd Link with Karen his wife
Jessica in front of Ralph C. Link
Ethan and Alisha in front of R. Dale and Lianne Link (the eldest son & family)









Ralph C. Link
153 Keck Road
Sarver, Pa. 16055
(412) 352-1103

Born: April 9, 1929, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Married: December 15, 1951
Wife: Shirley Margaret Neill
Born: December 8, 1930, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Children: Ralph Dale Link, born May 11, 1955, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Lloyd Alan Link, born May 28, 1958, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Nancy Lynn Link, born March 15, 1961, Butler, Pa.

SCHOOLING:

Graduated from Perry High School, Pittsburgh, Pa.
June 1947

Lay Ministry School, Penn West Conference of United
Church of Christ, September 1965 to May 1969

Commissioned Lay Minister June 1969

Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pa.,
September 1970

Graduated from Lancaster Theological Seminary May 1974

Ordained to Christian Ministry March 10, 1974

PASTORATES:

As Lay Minister: short term, 1 month or less in
various churches 1965 to 1967

Emlenton Lamartine Charge of United Church of Christ
1967 to 1969

Short term in various churches 1970 until Seminary
entrance July 1970

July 1970 to December 1973 Student Pastor at Trinity
Charge, New Bloomfield, Duncannon, Pa., Penn Central
Conference, United Church of Christ

December 1973 to present, St. Paul's United Church of
Christ, Butler, Pa., Penn West Conference, United
Church of Christ

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

OF

Ralph C. Link

I am the youngest of five children. I was born just prior to the onset of the Depression. Our family was very poor. My father was an alcoholic and my mother was a very religious person who was searching for the Lord. During my childhood she did her best to teach me the things of the Lord. Later in life she came to a personal relationship with Him.

I grew up in the Evangelical and Reformed Church where salvation by grace alone was not preached nor taught. I knew all about Jesus, what He did, how He lived, His miracles, His death and resurrection, but I didn't know Him personally.

My life had many ups and downs and all the while I was attending church and striving with my good works to please God. At a very low point in my life when we were deeply in debt and my wife and three children were all ill, I came to the crossroads. I watched a Billy Graham Crusade on television from some distant city and the message he preached seemed to be directed right at me. I wrestled with making that commitment to Christ, but didn't. The next afternoon and evening at work on the 4 to 12 shift I came to the conclusion that I needed to make that commitment to Christ. It seemed like there was no other choice if life was to have any meaning. That night when I came home from work at 1:00 A.M., I laid face down on the living room floor and told God that I couldn't live my life in my own strength and I accepted the gift of salvation from my Savior Jesus Christ. My life has never been the same.

Through several meaningful circumstances I was called by God to serve Him in the Christian Ministry and to help spread that wonderful message of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful and rewarding time it has been and I give Him all the praise for my salvation and the opportunity to serve Him.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

OF

Ralph C. Link

I believe the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired inerrant Word of God. I believe the Bible is the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and it is the final authority for the Christian faith and life.

I believe in one God, who is eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is true God and true man. I believe that He was born of the Virgin Mary, that He lived in sinless life, that He performed the miracles recorded in Scripture, that He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, that He bodily arose from the dead, that He ascended on high where He is at the right hand of Almighty God as our intercessor.

I believe in the Holy Spirit and that He comes and indwells each believer at the time of conversion. I believe that He lives in each believer to lead, to instruct, and to convict so that a believer may live a more godly life.

I believe that through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and through His resurrection, this is the only ground for justification and salvation for all who receive Him. A Lord and Savior and to such as receive Him, they are born of the Holy Spirit and become children of God.

I believe water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the Church but are not means of salvation.

I believe in the personal and premillennial and imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe in the resurrection of the dead, for the believer to resurrection of life and joy with the Lord, for the unbeliever to resurrection of judgement and everlasting punishment.